

Bonding With Your Baby



What's Happening

Attachment is a deep, lasting bond that develops between a caregiver and child during the baby's first few years of life. Loving attachment between a baby and caregiver is critical to the growth of a baby's body and mind. The brain's ability to regulate emotions and respond to stress can be damaged if a baby does not have a strong bond with a parent. This can result in lifelong problems. Babies who have this bond and feel loved have a better chance to grow up to be adults who trust others and know how to return affection.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal newborns:

- Have brief periods of sleep, crying or fussing, and quiet alertness many times each day
- Often cry for long periods for no apparent reason
- Love to be held and cuddled
- Respond to and imitate facial expressions
- Love soothing voices and will respond with smiles and baby noises
- Grow and develop every day; they learn new skills quickly and can outgrow difficult behaviors in a matter of weeks

What You Can Do

No one knows your child like you do, so you are in the best position to recognize and fulfill your child's needs. Parents who give lots of loving care and attention to their babies help their babies develop a strong attachment. Affection energizes your child to grow, learn, connect with others, and enjoy life. Here are some ways to promote bonding:

- Respond when your baby cries. Try to understand what he or she is saying to you. You can't "spoil" a newborn with too much attention—babies need and benefit from a parent's loving care even when they seem inconsolable.
- Hold and touch your baby as much as possible. You can keep him close with baby slings, pouches, or backpacks (for older babies).
- Use feeding time to look into your baby's eyes, smile, and talk to your baby.
- Read, sing, and play peek-a-boo. Babies love to hear human voices and will try to imitate your voice and the sounds you make.
- As your baby gets a little older, try simple games and toys. Once your baby can sit up, plan on spending lots of time on the floor with toys, puzzles, and books.

The best gift you can give your baby is YOU. The love and attention you give your baby now will stay with him or her forever and will help your baby grow into a healthier and happier child and adult.

This tip sheet was created with input from experts in national organizations that work to protect children and promote healthy families. To download this tip sheet or for more parenting tips, go to www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting or call 800.394.3366.

